

# REPRODUCTION OF WHITE PRIVILEGE IN VISUAL ART EDUCATION

BY

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THESIS

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### **Abstract**

This paper outlines the theories of reproduction, hegemony, White privilege, “Other”-ing, colorblindness, and dominator relations as they relate to race and class normalization. Following I examine the degree to which these and related constructs are addressed in as found in six separate mainstream journals of art education over a five-year period. My examination of colorblind and classist ideology is then situated in two case studies of art students. The paper closes with a discussion of practices and theoretical perspectives that could contribute to creating conversations and educational systems that undermine oppression.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Any attempt on the part of the individual students to critique the bourgeois biases that shape pedagogical process, particularly as they relate to epistemological perspectives (the points from which information is shared) will, in most cases, no doubt, be viewed as negative and disruptive. (hooks, 2008, p. 138)

This paper proposes that there are limitedly identified barriers that deter people who are not White and not of at least middle class social status from attaining college degrees and careers in the visual arts. To frame this examination of race and class in K-16 school art and art schools, I turned to culturally relevant theories articulated by scholars in the fields of education and sociology.

The first section of this paper outlines theories of reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), dominator relations (Eisler, 1987), “Other”-ing (Said, 1978), White privilege (McIntosh, 2004), and colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2010) at the broader level of our society and educational system. While some of these theorists may not be the only source of such ideas, I found their conceptualizations appropriate for this particular research project. By defining terms, and identifying explanations of how reproduction and hegemony operate within dominator relationships, I set the stage to see how these theories translate into practice in art education. I hypothesize that unnamed tensions reproduce a dearth of people of color and lower than middle class people from professional art educational tracks.

The next section of this paper investigates implications of these considerations for art education, spotlighting examples of colorblind and White supremacist ideologies and identifying omitted conversations that could address implicit dominator relationships. I

conduct this investigation by analyzing the appearance of selected concepts in selected journals (see Appendix A).

After that, I provide a more-focused elucidation of the economic and cultural realities of marginalized individuals in the US, through two case studies from art education environments. These case studies illustrate the identified ideologies functioning as exclusionary structures at the middle school and post-secondary levels. The first case study focuses on one of my former middle school students, and the second is an auto-ethnographic account of my experiences as a working class college student pursuing a bachelor of fine arts degree in painting.

I close the paper with a discussion of alternative models and recommendation for best practices in art education. I attempt to identify theories and practices grounded in sensitivity and conscientiousness that can break the chain of reproduction.

## Chapter 2: Theories for Understanding Race and Class

Race is a topic about which many people have strong emotional opinions. In my experience as a person race is excluded from conversations in educational environments. I speculate this is because there are few tools for, and many traps in, talking about it.

I use the concept of racial formation articulated in Omi and Winant's (1986) book *Racial Formation in the United States*. Instead of claiming a unified theory or explanation (which suggests an objective reality), Omi and Winant call their perspective a formation noting, "From a racial formation perspective, race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation. Too often, the attempt is made to understand race simply or primarily in terms of only one of these two analytical dimensions" (p. 56). Hall (1986), too, discusses race as a formation when he describes Gramsci's conception of race as a set of complex, overlapping ideas, noting,

[The modern state] plays a pivotal role in the construction of hegemony. In this reading, it becomes, not a thing to be seized, overthrown or "smashed" with a single blow, but a complex formation in modern societies, which must become the focus of a number of different strategies and struggles because it is an arena of different social contestations. (p. 19)

Variety in human experiences and phenotypes are natural but race is not. US racial history has been unjust and the decades of complexity have not come with a handbook for how to negotiate this painful past. Alexander (2010) urges open discussion about race, writing "economic insecurities and racial resentments have been exploited for political gain, and this manipulation has caused suffering for people of all colors" (p. 225). I see dialogue as a first action necessary to confront the past and academic environments as

one of many good spaces to begin such conversations. However, these conversations cannot happen if instructors feel uncomfortable facilitating.

Like race, class seems to have an unspoken agenda in educational contexts, which is made visible when it is socially contested. Race, although an amorphous and socially constructed concept, is, at least partially visible in qualities that easily map onto the body as physical characteristics (Delacruz, 2011). Class, by contrast, is understood in terms of behaviors such as earning and spending habits, language patterns, and cultural values (Payne, 1996). This kind of information is difficult to measure and translate into data, and thus, I would argue, helps make class more invisible than race.

Due to the invisibility and fluidity of the parameters of the definitions, class is a slippery category. The New York Times published a special series of articles in 2005 discussing the complexity of class today in a useful way. The study describes class in the following way:

When societies were simpler, the class landscape was easier to read. Marx divided 19th-century societies into just two classes; Max Weber added a few more. As societies grew increasingly complex, the old classes became more heterogeneous. As some sociologists and marketing consultants see it, the commonly accepted big three - the upper, middle and working classes - have broken down into dozens of microclasses, defined by occupations or lifestyles. (Scott & Leonhardt)

The article goes on to provide four factors by which to define a person's class: education, income, occupation and wealth. To this list, I would add that what people report as materially and morally valuable also defines class. In short, class too is a social

formation, but one that is more subject to obfuscation because it is based in behaviors rather than physical characteristics.

In capitalist societies such as the US, class is particularly hidden because of its potential for social volatility. By this I mean that if people think they have a choice of what class to belong to, presumably, everyone would want to be at the top of the hierarchy. I think there would be civil unrest and a demand for equality of material and economic wealth if everyone living below the poverty line questioned their class status or felt entitled to more. Thus, it is in the interest of the ruling elite to pacify the masses, and, from personal experience, I know that people of the lowest classes can go through their entire schooling career without realizing their class or recognizing that they belong to one.

Although I have been accumulating social security benefits through paid employment since I was 12 years old and my mother raised my four sisters and I on less than \$25,000 a year, I did not learn to name my class status until I was 25 years old, 3 years after completing my undergraduate education. My sisters, all of whom are older than me, had never articulated their class-consciousness until I started to talk about it last year. Why did we not think about our lives in terms of class? For me it was less that I considered my background or current living situations middle class; rather, I did not think about the language of naming my class as a project in the first place.

Through my study of race and class, I find six theories/concepts/terms key to understanding how the invisibility of race and class translates into systemic oppression. The remainder of this section will define and summarize each theory. This exposition will serve as a prelude to my look at how these systems transpire in my limited study of art



education research and practice. The six concepts are: *reproduction*, *hegemony*, *dominator relations*, *the Other*, *white privilege*, and *colorblind ideology*. A part of this paper is an attempt to figure how to have safe conversations that address the complexities of race and class in a way accessible to even the youngest people in our society. I hypothesize that as we get older, these things become more painful to talk about, and thus the K-16 environment, with the intellectually developing members of our society, is the ideal environment in which to practice dialoguing about race and class. When I explain, reproduction, hegemony, dominator relations, the Other, white privilege, and colorblind ideology in the rest of this section, I think of it as similar to writing the vocabulary section of a lesson plan: I define the terms first to insure a synchronicity of understanding which will allow me to reference the concepts freely in a larger discussion.

## **2.1 Reproduction**

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) concept of reproduction says that cultural values and norms are transmitted from one generation to the next through daily life. These norms become invisible to see and thus hard to identify because they are very much a part of our lived experience.

The song "Turning Point" (Simone, 1967, track 8) provides a curious musical example of the intergenerational reproduction of racism. The song's lyrics consist almost entirely of the words of a child asking her mother whether her friend (a "brown girl") can come over to play. Then without any indication of the mother's response, the music stops and the girl asks, "What'd you say? ...why not? ...why not? ...oh, I see." The song effectively illustrates the reproduction of racial division in the United States without providing the mother's words, or any explicit reference to the child's race. If the other

girl is “brown” and the first girl has to ask “why not” we know that this is a moment in which racial division is being reproduced, whatever the specific texts may have been at a particular moment.

The power of the concept of reproduction is that it points to the unconscious perpetuation of patterns of culture that often go un-named. When cultural reproduction goes un-named, one can fall into the habit of speaking about individuals as though they choose all their behaviors instead of acknowledging that culture is an amalgamation of lived experiences. Plus, much of what constitutes human culture is acquired when we are little boys and girls receiving answers from adults and teachers. When we reproduce them, we do not cite our cultural sources.

Naming sites of reproduction of cultural values is not only useful when analyzing negative or undesirable situations. The same could be said about the reproduction of ideas in the academy, but here naming the sources of our ideas is required. Even in citation and questioning that which I know, I reproduce an ideology that transparency and inquiry are preferable.

## **2.2 Hegemony**

Hegemony is an important concept in the work of understanding oppression. Gramsci’s idea of hegemony describes the indirect way in which cultural norms work to control one group of people in a society to the benefit of a smaller, ruling group of people (Gramsci, 1971). The mainstream media is an example of a hegemonic force within US culture. Television audiences have little say in deciding what gets broadcast, but at the same time television programs determine boundaries of acceptable discourse in the

broader society. Hegemonic systems normalize the means by which the masses interact with the powerful members of society who make decisions about everyone's lives.

Systems of oppression are pervasive and resistant to change because of the reproduction of hegemonic norms as natural. Race, class, and gender have all been identified as sites for oppression within our society (Bonilla-Silva 2010, Thompson 2003, McIntosh 1988, Butler 1990) and each is replicated by the cultural reproduction that Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) describe. These systems have functioned for centuries and they have not been overturned. There are many reasons for why this is so, and we will look at a few here. Bourdieu and Passeron explain the complexity of these invisible structures.

In abolishing happy unconsciousness of familial or primitive educations, actions of hidden persuasion which, better than any other form of education, impose misrecognition of their objective truth (since they tend towards the point of not even appearing as education), the ES [educational system] would lay itself open to the question of its right to set up a relation of pedagogic communication and to delimit what deserves to be inculcated - were it not that the very fact of institutionalization gives it the specific means of annihilating the possibility of the questions. In short, the persistence of an [educational system] proves that it resolves by its very existence the questions raised by its existence. (p. 62)

We live with domination because the hegemonic system has taught us to avoid conflict. Avoiding confrontation at all costs is a manufactured complicity reproduced in one's internalized images of survival or success in a desirable society. hooks (2008) points out that "There can be no intervention that challenges the status quo if we are not willing to

interrogate the way our presentation of self as well as our pedagogical process is often shaped by middle-class norms” (p. 139). In other words, oppression is aided by the refusal of oppressed people to call it oppression. This brings us to the analysis of the workings of our next theory, dominator relations.

### **2.3 Dominator Relationships**

Indispensable in naming the root of the problem Eisler (1987) identifies two conceptual frameworks of cultural models in her Cultural Transformation theory; the dominator model and the partnership model. She writes, “the partnership and dominator models do not only describe individual relationships. They describe systems of belief and social structures that either nurture and support—or inhibit and undermine—equitable, democratic, nonviolent, and caring relations” (Eisler, 2005, p.48). Many of our societal structures—male-headed households, racism, colonialism (Eisler, 1987, p. 168)— can be described through the dominator model.

Eisler identifies the dominator model in education, asking, “Are we telling young people to be responsible, kind, and nonviolent at the same time that curriculum content still celebrates male violence and conveys environmentally unsustainable and social irresponsible messages?” (2005, p. 49). The framing of the question emphasizes the construction of language and presentation of the self situates us politically. Without careful attendance, we run the risk of propagating messages in contradiction to our values.

### **2.4 The Other**

The creation of the Other is an imaginary group of people created by highlighting perceived insufficiencies in a group, thus extenuating the moral responsibility of the

observer, depending on the identity of the Other, to educate, convert, or civilize. In the text *Orientalism*, Said (1978) writes “Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3), but “Oriental”-izing or Other-ing can be done with any racial, ethnic, religious, or geographically defined category of people. The process of Other-ing has to do with the use of knowledge and power acting through knowledge to achieve a particular political agenda, with an overall goal of domination. A common example of Other-ing is when we use categorical phrases (us, them, they, we) in order to distinguish ourselves from something undesirable.

## **2.5 White Privilege**

White privilege is the idea that white people have systemic or institutional power inherited from centuries of economic domination of others. As identified by McIntosh (1988), White privilege is the idea that “whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal” (p. 1). White privilege is a hegemonic ideology, which is reproduced most efficiently when unnamed. Castagno (2008) writes that Whiteness “just like any other hegemonic ideology and institution, is most successful when the majority of its adherents are least aware of it and its power” (p. 329). While McIntosh (1988) describes the benefits for White people:

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (p. 1)

Conversations about race are important in the classroom since “90% of K-12 teachers are White while 36% of the national school population is comprised of students of color” (Parks, 2004, p. 15). Given that the K-12 teaching force is predominantly White, it is no surprise that it is not considered a distinct race, but rather the standard that others should emulate. Work towards dismantling ideas of White supremacy needs to be done not only in the K-12 schools, but also in the colleges and scholarly publications where White scholars colonize the work of the Other to enrich their writing and enhance their authority by strategically quoting material by scholars of color to support pre-conceived ideas (Thompson, 2003). This instrumentalization of racialized “Others” is reflected in the teacher training programs developed in these same institutions. In her study of teachers in an economically segregated Colorado school system, Castagno (2008) found that “teachers were either genuinely afraid of explicitly naming and talking about race or did not know how to do so – or both” (p. 329). Similarly, Giroux (1997) notices that “White scholars depend too much on certifiable “others” in their analysis of race” (p. 291), and hooks (1990) notices scholars doing little “to investigate and justify all aspects of White culture from a standpoint of ‘difference’” (p. 55).

## **2.6 Colorblind Ideology**

Colorblind ideology is a concept very closely related to White privilege. Here I will quote at length a definition of colorblind ideology from Bonilla-Silva (2010), the sociologist who named the phenomenon:

Compared to Jim Crow racism, the ideology of color blindness seems like “racism lite.” Instead of relying on name calling, color-blind racism otherizes softly; instead of proclaiming God placed minorities in the world in a servile position, it

suggest they are behind because they do not work hard enough; instead of viewing interracial marriage as wrong on a straight racial basis, it regards it as “problematic” because of concerns over the child, location, or the extra burden it places on couples. Yet this new ideology has become a formidable political tool for the maintenance of the racial order. (p. 3)

White privilege is closely linked to colorblind ideology because the two combine to extend the position of Whites as the dominating race (both in number and in terms of coercive violence) into an era in which it is taboo to have racial discrimination. As Bonilla-Silva tells it, “since actors racialized as “White”—or as members of the dominant race—receive material benefits from the racial order, they struggle (or passively receive the manifold wages of Whiteness) to maintain their privileges” (p. 9). At the same time, the colorblind ideology is so strong that most White people do not even acknowledge themselves as White preferring instead to see themselves outside the color system (dated as it is) or a descendent of a particular group (thus de-bunking racial categories while continuing to enjoy their perks).

Of course this does not mean that all White people benefit from the same level of privilege, or even want to. A “race traitor” for instance is a White person who does not endorse the ideology of color blindness but rather acts against the race-conscious oppression that they see. Who would do such a thing? After interviewing 1,027 people Bonilla-Silva suggested, “White women from working-class origins are the most likely candidates to commit racial treason in the United States” (p. 16). This is because women are at the bottom of the White power hierarchy owing to their gender status, and thus are more likely to feel solidarity with those who have been positioned downward owing to

physiological traits. Additionally Bonilla-Silva posits that, though less educated, working class White people are oft perceived as the most racist in our society, they are, in actuality, no more racist, just less inhibited and less equipped with colorblind rhetorical strategies, than are younger, educated, middle-class people who make the most of the “resources of colorblind racism” (2010, p. 71).

Yu (2002) argues that power is constructed in a web of relations between people, and does not lie in words; and that therefore to use colorblind rhetoric to call for a more just and equitable society is not useful as it runs the risk of ignoring the history of racial inequities. And while it may be true that power lies in social relations, noticing and naming oppressive systems and White privilege is a step towards making out social world more inclusive.

With the basics of these theories and terms laid out, I now move on to a description of my methodology before examining examples of how these theories function in the context of K-16 school-based visual arts education.



### Chapter 3: Methods

Reflection on my lack of racial awareness revealed that at least in part, my colorblindness had to do with the fact that I was never confronted with these issues until I was in the classroom as a teacher. I became frustrated in my realization that my teacher training left me under-prepared. Suspecting that a lack of conversation about race in teacher training was, in part, a reflection of a lack of conversations in the literature given to pre-service teachers, I combed mainstream art education sources that, as a certified art educator and alumni of a top art education program were in my mental inventory. I deliberately avoided seeking out journals that were outside of my mental repertoire because I wanted to re-search the sources I was exposed to in my training. I was coming at this research project from the position of a new participant to art education research and I wanted to see what this conversation looked like from this unique perspective. Focusing primarily on race in my search, I looked for conversations about the intersection of the struggle for racial equality with anti-racist pedagogy.

I reviewed the past five years of the following periodicals: *Art Education*, *Studies in Art Education*, *the International Journal of Art and Design Education*, *the Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, *the International Journal of Education Through Art*, and *Visual Arts Research*<sup>1</sup>. Racial justice is the most pressing issue of our time; I limited my search to the past five years because I wanted to investigate if this sense of urgency is reflected in the climate of my scholarly community's' mainstream. In these periodicals, I searched for articles with one of the following keywords in its title, abstract, and/or full

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<sup>1</sup> I now know there are other journal in art education deal with these constructs and the constructs have been written about prior to the last five years, but I was most concerned with the contemporary conversation.

text: African American, anti-racist, Black, colorblind/color blind/colorblindness, critical pedagogy, critical race theory, culturally relevant, ethnic, multicultural, multiculturalism, race, racial, urban, white, whiteness, and white privilege (See appendix A). To search the terms I identified in which databases each journal was stored (J-Stor, EBSCO, etc.), limited the year to 2006-present and searched for each keyword. After first searching each word in titles, I then did full document searches. For the magazine *Art Education*, I physically went through each issue from 2006 to February 2011, searching for any of my keywords in the tables of contents. I created lists of each article that came back for each term, in the event that the same article was summoned by more than one of the search terms.

I formulate my literature survey in relation to the absence of literature. Though whiteness and race relations are dominant themes of contemporary education policy debates, they are not often mentioned in mainstream art education's professional journals. The lack of research published in the mainstream literature suggests that, at this time, racism and race relations in the United States are not perceived as an important issue in our field. I am aware that this discourse has been occurring prior to the self-imposed limitations of my search, and am not trying to ignore that. Rather, I attempted to make my research manageable for a project of this size and also in line with my limitation of seeing the research through the eyes of a semi-fresh participant in the field of art education research. The limitation of the historical scope of my research has come to my attention as a problematic component to this study. Needless to say, there is much room for future research.

## **Chapter 4: Art Education**

How do hegemony, dominator relationships, the concept of the Other, White privilege, and colorblind ideology function in the field of art education? To answer this question I begin with a literature review of recently published article found in mainstream academic journals serving high school art teachers and professors of art education, before producing two case studies.

When teaching the kinds of art education curriculum in line with the “best practices” of critical media literacy and pulling references from an array of diverse artistic traditions, I recognize that I am emotionally and socially incapable of consistently making meaningful connections with my students. This is a reflection of how poorly prepared teacher training can leave its participants. Frye (1997) notes, “if you want to do good, and you don't know good from bad, you can't move” (p. 153). This discomfort is good because it compels me to continue to learn and grow, and bad because my motivation for teaching comes from relating to the students in my class, and I cannot do so when I feel out of place. As much as I might want to do a good job of applying the politics of representation, it simply feels wrong to stand there as a White person and push an agenda of, say, the importance of Latino/a artists in a room full of Latino/a children, when I can never have the experiences of a Latina person.

These feelings are heightened when I analyze the extreme differences in the emotional preparation I put into different teaching contexts. For instance, I am not nearly as invested in my students at the University Saturday School classes as I am in my public middle school after-school program. I experience more anxiety about my Local students; I have more of a desire to ‘do a good job’. I prepare differently and have a very rehearsed

presentation of myself for the Local students. What is the source of these distinct performances? Why and in what ways do I change in the different contexts? I feel differently because I imagine that my lower-income students are struggling to navigate their experience of a society where poverty translates into fewer resources, larger class size, and thus less attention from adults. In a sense I can see these two groups of youth in competition to win access to these resources. While this is a problem for most people forming identities in the capitalist economic system, I hypothesize that students from wealthier families have a deeper sense of stability and security, and this contributes to their identity formation in a racialized social order.

When we ignore the challenge of critiquing the segregated educational system we reproduce the divisions that make art education irrelevant to the emerging majority of students (i.e. minority students). White art teachers need to be especially well informed about issues of race because of their inherent power as stable adult authority figures who are in a position of asking Black and brown students with developing identities to construct work with often intimately personal themes. By refusing to reflect on the power dynamics inherent in our racialized social order, art educators construct volatile and potentially psychologically poisonous environments that may turn students of color off to art permanently. “New art teachers need knowledge and skills that equip them to meaningfully engage students of various social and cultural backgrounds, especially students unlike themselves” (Kraehe, 2010, p. 172). Unless art educators start to navigate this terrain more carefully and intentionally, they will continue to perpetuate the marginalization of people of color who teach art within the United States and make themselves obsolete to a growing majority of the US student population.

Art educators in colleges have homework to do: we must continue to reflect on and criticize the political agendas that shape our teaching about other cultures. We need to vigilantly ask ourselves why we choose to introduce a specific culture at a given particular historical conjuncture (keeping in mind its relation to the past), to a particular student body in a particular geographical area. Having chosen a culture to represent in our art class, it is our responsibility to position that culture in relation to our own in terms of matrices of domination and subordination (Desai, 2000).

#### **4.1 A Literature Review**

Articles have been written about art education practices with students of color (Adejumo, 2010; Charland, 2010; Kraehe, 2010; Lesk, 2007; Millman, 2010; Selig, 2009). Some authors engage in the problematic practice of using coded language instead of directly addressing race. When talking about race some authors adopt strategies that enable them to avoid directly naming skin color. This colorblind vocabulary warrants closer examination. To examine the state of discourse in the field, I turned to professional literature, the selection of which is articulated in the methodology section.

I conducted a content analysis of the last five years of six art education journals, searching for clues as to the state of discussion of race/class in the field, I searched for different encodings of the subject. The most prevalent term in my search for race-encoding vocabulary was the word “urban”, for example. In one article, a writer/teacher used the word “urban” five times in a five-page paper (Selig, 2009).

##### **4.1.1 Urban.**

It is important to note that while this Selig (2009) avoided explicitly mentioning race as an important component of the dynamics of her classroom, the race of her

students can be deduced by using other cues. First, the photographs accompanying the article show only Black students. Second, when describing sites of visual culture selected by her students for discussion and representation she mentioned “features of the vehicles, especially upgrades such as rims” (Selig, 2009, p. 48) and showed her students artwork containing Air Jordan sneakers and expensive brands of alcohol (Selig, p. 49). These examples are not merely quirks in the “urban” imaginary, but tokens of severe economic handicaps upon the racialized underclass of American cities. Rims, Jordan’s, and booze are major components of the mass-media portrayals of the African-American male (Hurt, 2006). By formulating her study in colorblind language, Selig passed up an opportunity to discuss real issues of representation that are relevant to the development of racialized educational subjects in American cities.

The article handles the issue of racial agency with kid gloves. The one mention of race in the entire article comes from an African-American youth who, when speaking about how people identify with clothing brands, suddenly remarks, “I like to hang out with both Black and White people” (Selig, 2009, p. 50). Like many young people in the United States, this student was conscious of the discussion of race and was sorting out her views on this complex topic in a way she knows is socially acceptable, that is, by saying she likes both White and Black people. Unfortunately, this is as far as many adults have learned to take the conversation; the child quoted outnumbered the authors’ references to race. The academic vocabulary of the essay uses the limited analytical category of “urban.” While the inclusion of a hopeful statement of non-discrimination is likely well intended, the statement in fact represents a censorship of all information about race except for a person’s non-preference for it.

Colorblind formulations of racialized classroom experiences by definition fail to provide conceptual tools for analyzing the pervasive racial inequity that our urban youth experience—it leaves adults and teachers, at best, with no skills for talking about race, and at worst denigrating their students’ culture of knowledge. The latter applies to Selig who reveals condescension in writing, “many of my students have multiple tattoos... ..originally I thought the tattoos had arbitrary designs” (Selig, 2009, p. 48). While the author labors to mention the rims and the Crown Royal in her students’ art, and the tattoos on their young skin, she does not talk about the deliberate attachment of meaning to the symbols of race, class, and gender that structure her students’ identities. By neglecting to reference race outside of the uncontroversial preference to “hang out with both Black and White people” the essay is left with no resources to decode the tattoos as cultural artifacts (as art!) of the youth that the author aspires to educate.

#### **4.1.2 Inner City.**

Another article uses the code words, “inner-city” and “poor” in substitution of a frank discussion about race (Lesk, 2007). The article is written by a museum educator in Washington D.C. where 79% of the student body is African American (DCPS Office of Data and Accountability, 2009). All the students in the photographs accompanying the article are easily identifiable as African American, but the correlation to skin color and geography goes unacknowledged. The code “inner city” is used four times in the three-page article (Lesk, 2007). Lesk mentions entering the classroom with low expectations (p. 7) because the director of the enrichment program from which the students came called them an “incorrigible bunch” (p. 7), a formulation the author chose to change to “extremely challenging” (p. 7). In order to set up the educator as heroically making a

“small, but important, impact on 20 bright young men” (p. 8) Lesk notes, “these students live within two miles of the Smithsonian museum, yet only one had ever been to an art museum before” (p. 7). Looking through the lens of Bonilla-Silva’s (2010) construct of colorblind racism, I understand the article as a description of helping “underprivileged” black student to become more like middle class white people through assuming the normative virtue of White values such as museum-going. Finally, Lesk mentions the students come from “diverse backgrounds” without elaboration, failing to explain or explore the nature of diversity. From whom are the students diverse? From the article, the students appear to have much in common with one another.

Colorblind language such as used by Lesk (2007) has become the norm in U.S. society and should not be blamed on these authors. In fact, they have taken a step toward engaging racialized youth from economically distressed backgrounds. If current art education discourse is stripped of all references to race and racism, that is not only a problem for two authors but a problem throughout the visual arts. The hegemonic reign of colorblind coding has robbed our discourse of its ability to critique the most glaring issue facing public school teachers: racial disparities in achievement. Clearly art educators are not blind to the issue of racism, but they are operating in a historically contingent paradigm; namely, colorblindness coupled with an uncritical promotion of multiculturalism. The power of hegemony is its ability to reproduce structures of domination even in the words of those who are trying to speak against it. The next section examines dialogue that discusses race via the celebratory narratives of multiculturalism and globalization.



#### **4.1.3 Multiculturalism amidst Colorblindness.**

The lack of self-reflection on positionality in the social hierarchy (i.e. the invisibility of the White privilege in our profession) reproduces teaching practices that are not effective with students of color. If “to initiate a critical multicultural and cross-cultural art education, it is crucial that art teachers become versed in the skills of how the dominant society presents the Other in all forms of art” (Parks, 2004, p. 15) and we agree that “new art teachers need knowledge and skills that equip them to meaningfully engage students of various social and cultural backgrounds, especially students unlike themselves” (Kraehe, 2010, p. 172) then a good place for pre-service teachers to start may be with an examination of their own race and ethnicity.

It is tautological to say that we cannot solve the problem of institutional racism by claiming to see no race, and thus no racism. A nutritionist is not going to promote healthy eating by endorsing “ingredient-blindness” amidst a plethora of highly processed foods, nor will an art educator truly committed to racial parity promote “colorblindness” in the face of racial disparities that affect our students’ achievement throughout the school system. A real commitment to multiculturalism, grounded in an unshakable solidarity with the students we serve, mandates a critical discussion of the role of race and class in the education of future artists. If we wish to affirm our students’ desire to “hang out with both Black and White people” then we must start by admitting that we, the adult educators, can indeed see the racialized existence that people of color do not have the privilege of being “blind” to.

The second most-popular search term from my literature survey was “multiculturalism”. Multiculturalism is a topic of much contestation. To some,

multicultural competence is understood as drawing from “many diverse artistic traditions... teaching social justice and respecting students’ voices” (Millman, 2010, p. 21). Deloria, however, warns, “simply knowing *about* Indians, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latino/as become[s considered] a satisfactory form of social and political engagement” (as cited in Thompson, 2003). In other words, multiculturalism is compatible with maintaining the primacy of White art traditions at the center of the art curriculum, and becomes a sort of side-show of politically correct Other-ing.

Perhaps the acceptance in the field of the vocabulary of multiculturalism is the closest art education has come to engaging an anti-racist pedagogy, and what is needed now is further investigation of the consequences of adopting that framework. Delacruz (1996) described how multicultural curriculum products are asynchronous with theory when the goal is “broadening our concept of what we believe is worth knowing about art is at the heart of multicultural education” (p. 86). That curriculum materials marketed as “multicultural” were in fact reaffirming White privilege by promoting White, Western values is unsurprising, especially through the lens Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi lay out in their book *White Logic, White Methods* (2008). In the book they show the context within which “White supremacy has defined the techniques and processes of reasoning about social facts” (p. 17). In my experience as a pre-service teacher there was a push to use diverse multicultural artistic exemplars in the presentation of art. Though I used the technique while student teaching in a racially diverse (47.6% African American, 25.8% White, 17.6% Asian, 8.2% Latina/o, 0.5% American Indian, 0.3% mixed race (Illinois State Board of Education, 2007)) school, it mattered little in regard to student engagement. I had few skills for navigating cultural difference between my students and

I, as evidenced by the fact that my classroom had the most discipline referrals of any room during the time I taught there. I attribute this in part to the fact that I learned about multiculturalism in an environment divorced from a multicultural reality. Reflection on the lack of diversity in art educational student experiences raises the difficult question: How can I, a young White woman from rural Illinois, speak with authority about art to which I have no meaningful connection? One can certainly try, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Another common pitfall in multicultural art education identified by Kraehe (2010) is the “labeling of art as primitive, ethnic, and regional [which] devalue[s] the artists as well as the subject matter and traditions characteristic of those artworks” (p. 167). In light of this problem, some scholars, so as to lend authenticity to the information, try to outline proper ways for teachers to present art from other peoples’ cultures (Knight, 2006). Noting this, Desai (2000) writes, “multicultural art education discourses affirm the position that iconography, if situated contextually, can be understood and appreciated by all people” (p. 125). Desai (2000) further identifies this problem as having “reduced non-Western cultures to some constructed ideas of their essential characteristics that supposedly can be represented authentically” (p. 126). And she also takes “issue with the way the notion of authentic representation as shaped in multiculturalism because it overlooks the politics of location and positionality and thereby reduces and essentializes cultures” (p. 119).

#### **4.1.4 Globalization: Substitutive Narratives.**

Another problem with multiculturalism in the art education literature is the focus on globalization and cultures of people from other countries. The problem is that instead

of focusing on non-dominant (meaning non-White, non-middle class) populations within the United States, the discourse privileges international agents (Dewey, 2008; Duncum, 2000; Gielen, 2006; Mui, 2010; Silk, 2011). This is simply unacceptable in the context of a field that has not satisfactorily addressed inequity within the United States, and which is tasked with educating teachers of US students. Developing discursive practices that address racial inequity experienced by, and the cultural agency of African-American and Latin American people in the United States is crucial, especially as the national demographic moves toward a more racially balanced population. The project is made more urgent by reports that income distribution is more disparate than ever in our lifetimes, with White households now having twenty times the wealth of African-American households, and eighteen times that of Hispanic-Americans households (<http://www.reachhispanic.com/2011/08/05/pew-hispanic-wealth-gap-between-Whites-and-hispanics-at-record-high/>). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, "more than half the children" in ten US states "are minorities, including California, Mississippi, Georgia, Maryland, Florida, Arizona, Nevada, Texas, New Mexico and Hawaii" (Pasadena Star-News, 2011). How can a discussion about the globalization and transnationalism of art be relevant for an art educator trying to better understand her position in the racial hierarchy within her own country? Conversations about global and transnational relations are a *substitution* for conversations about intercultural exchange at home. To exemplify my point I will quote at length from a report produced by the University of Illinois' Center on Democracy in a Multiracial Society. The report is entitled *Elusive Equity: Graduate Education at Illinois' Flagship University* (2010).

The 2009 Strategic Plan Progress Report (Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) tells us that we have a diverse campus community. The document suggests broad racial ethnic minority participation at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as among faculty. Yet, our review of campus data does not support this public image. What we see is diversity increasingly defined by the growing presence of international students. This approach to diversity masks severe inequities. It leaves un-interrogated the conditions of African Americans, Latinos, and American Indians — traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities (URM). Equity for these populations has historically eluded the Illinois campus community. This remains the case today, even as the campus projects an image of diversity. (p. ii)

The report goes on to provide a plethora of statistics and graphic representations showing no noticeable difference in the rate of African American, Hispanic and Native Americans graduate student enrollment at Illinois since 1975 (p. 10). Also notable is that during 2009 in the entire School of Art and Design there were only two graduate students from the URM demographics—two Hispanic students in art history (p. 17). From the CDMS data and my own research it seems that art education scholars understand privileged international conversations to be more relevant to their scholarship than conversations about racial minorities who are scarcely seen in the ranks of art education.

Looking for an explanation for the low numbers of African-American people in the field, Charland (2010) interviewed African American high school students asking them to make lists of both stereotypes they felt White people sometimes attribute to

Black people and stereotypes people have of artists. He found a “startling overlap between informants’ understandings of society’s demeaning stereotypes of artists and African Americans” which “suggests that an African American adolescent who assumes the mantle of artist willingly takes on social stigma aligned with negative racial stereotypes as well.” (p. 123). This study also shows that while the percent of African-American college enrollees overall has increased in the past decade, the percent of undergraduate art students remains disproportionately small. Students of visual arts specifically are significantly lower than students of dance, music and theatre. Further, only a fraction of those students go on to graduate study, the more likely path to a professional career in the fine arts (Charland, p.116). Charland says that while past rationales (historically hegemonic, and anti-other aesthetic of the Western canon, paucity of opportunity for Black children to make art, discouragement from interactions in the racist professional art world) persist, they cannot fully account for Black avoidance of visual art (p. 117). Thus, the author points to risk of cultural ostracism for African-American participants in the visual arts.

While group dynamics make it difficult to bring up race, so too does the habit of White art educators to avoid any critique of power dynamics inherent in their racial positionality in the hierarchical social order of the United States. Looking at the experience of the multicultural student body, Thompson (2005) proposed

A classroom in which students of color feel safe, supported, and acknowledged in talking about racism they face will be a classroom in which White students almost certainly do not feel safe, affirmed or free to talk in ways that seem natural and spontaneous and appropriate to them. (p. 24)

Ignoring the challenging task of critiquing the segregated educational system and refusing to reflect on the power dynamics inherent in our racialized social order constructs potentially volatile, psychologically poisonous environments, irrelevant or even threatening for too many students.

This is not to say there are not important conversations to be had about the globalization of art and the link it has to conversations of multiculturalism in the art education classroom. Desai (2005) contends, “there is a tendency to render invisible the transnationalization of indigenous art in a global economy in multicultural art education and thus inadvertently mythologize the power of the local as independent of international power structures” (p. 303). As examples, Desai points to Mexican art made in Indonesia and Amish quilts made in Laos (p. 302). Desai discusses the world fairs and “finely orchestrated large-scale spectacles called cultural festivals in the 1980’s and 1990’s” (p. 296) as some of the first perpetrators of the label “ethnic”. She finds this category problematic for several reasons. Mainly, this classification helps the West maintain their status as the dominant culture by marginalizing non-Western forms of representation and hides “the fact that the dominant culture is also composed of several ethnicities” (p. 297). That the ruling class is composed of multiple ethnicities could be a potential catalyst for discussions about race. When discussing multiculturalism we could speak of the culture of ruling elites as well as cultures of poverty, though hooks (2008) has pointed out the existence of a taboo against discussions of class in the classroom. Perhaps a conversation about racism and classism in the United States could start with a discussion about the globalized production and consumption of international goods, decoding the localities that actually produce them, and looking at the question of who profits.

## 4.2 Case Studies

To explore the issues of power and privilege in the art classroom, and also to inject my own agency into the discussion, I present two case studies in art education. In each of these two case studies we see an example of a student with a joy and love of art who struggles in his and her academic art environment for reasons I argue are rooted in issues of race and class. The first is aimed at providing some context for understanding the experience of a student treated as an Other, struggling in a middle school environment. The second case study explores the reproduction of middle class aesthetics in a college painting program populated in part by working class students.

### 4.2.1 Reproducing Whiteness via Domination of an Identity Seeking Other.

For the last year I have taught visual art in an after school arts program at Local Middle School (LMS). There is a full time art teacher at LMS in whose room I teach. Each day of the program, the regular art teacher and I overlap for a few minutes while I unpack and she prepares to go home for the day. In a previous semester, I had a student, Roy<sup>2</sup>, with a talent and passion for art. This student was ostracized by the regular art teacher because of his independent vision, and alienated in his school environment because of his cultural background. When I was first recruiting for the program, a school administrator walked me around the building and introduced me to the language arts teacher who introduced me to Roy. At the time of our introduction, he was hanging out in her classroom after school, alone on one end of the room, silently drawing in his sketchbook—conjure the stereotype of an anti-social, individualistic artist.

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<sup>2</sup> This is not the name of the school, nor am I using the boy's real name.



The student demographic of LMS at the time I was teaching was 56% low income, 47.7% Black, 38.1% White, 8.8% Asian, and 4.6% Hispanic (Illinois State Board Education, 2010). Roy self-identified as a Persian Zoroastrian and thus would be in either part of the .8 % uncategorized in these statistics, or classified as Asian. Roy's parents were immigrants from Iran via India and Roy was born in the United States. His father is a professor at the local community college and his mother works in the home. Late in the semester, Roy's mom told me that although he was on the "gifted" track at school, he was falling behind in his schoolwork because he would not turn in his homework; he frequently left it in his backpack for her to find when she came to pick him up from school. I tried to give her encouraging words about Roy: he's extremely creative; he should continue to pursue art, and go to the local University Saturday Art School the next semester for more art education. There was little I could say within the socially-acceptable discourse about the family's ethnic identity, though it was clear Roy was suffering from the fact that there were hardly any ethnic Persians in the school, and most children will never have heard of Zoroastrianism. In fact there are very few even in Iran where Shia Islam is the official state religion.

Throughout the course of the semester I worked with LMS students, Roy continually made reference to his race/ethnicity. In the class, I allowed the students to choose songs from my computer, When it was Roy's turn to choose, he chose Queen's song *Bicycle*, and reported that he chose it because lead singer Freddie Mercury, like Roy, was Zoroastrian. Zoroastrianism is a remarkable religion as both one of the oldest (3,500 years old) and least populous (only 190,000 followers worldwide). There are only 11,000 Zoroastrian people living in the United States (Goodstein, 2006). Still, Roy could

point to something in the educational environment and make a direct connection to his identity, even in his rare familial religion. Roy was visibly pleased to identify a shared reference that could serve as a door to a conversation about his unique ethnic heritage.

A few weeks later, US Navy Seals in Pakistan killed Osama bin Laden. The next day, I saw Roy and he told me that the kids at school had been repeatedly asking him how he felt now that his grandfather had been killed. Enter the reductionist racial lens of mainstream America: the number of racial narratives available in the popular discourse are limited; if you are not Black, White, Asian, Latina/o, or American Indian there are few categories remaining for others to project onto you. In presenting the story to me, he emphasized that he is Persian, not Arab. To the rest of the students at school, Roy is an Other. In my experience, many people in the US population know the difference between Arab and Persian people. Not to mention, Osama bin Laden is not considered a fair representation of either Arab or Islamic sentiments outside of the United States (Curtis, 2004). One might just as quickly expect the young school children to congratulate Roy on the Arab Spring, save for the fact that the United States has supported monarchy dictatorships in Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, amongst others.

With this in mind, Roy's exhibition of behaviors characteristic of an American-Born Confused Desi or ABCD<sup>3</sup> were no surprise. Though the term literally refers to people with South Asian (Indian and Pakistani) parents, Roy's family came to the US by way of India and his identity was clearly "confused". One day he came in to the classroom claiming to be "Black" and acting the part as best he could. When the Black girls in the class confronted him on his claim and behavior, he did not back down and

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<sup>3</sup> ABCD was a term I first learned through the screen adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *the Namesake*. It is a common acronym in Indian American culture.

responded that he was Black because his skin was not White. Bonilla-Silva would agree with Roy's assertion of Blackness and classify Roy as belonging to a group in our society dubbed the "collective black" (2010, p. 179). The hegemonic racial dichotomy of mainstream society would also project a similar distinction, though perhaps through the more politically acceptable (though equally reductionist) "people of color".

One day in class Roy was acting in a way I had never seen before. He came into the room quietly, but as the day progressed he became more and more amped. He started talking about doing pot and acid and mimicking snorting cocaine. He would not stop saying the word "chick(s)" in reference to the girls in the classroom and at one point, I'm quite sure he said "twat" though when I asked him what word he used he wouldn't repeat it.

As his profanity escalated, I thought about how a regular classroom teacher would respond. I considered that behavior such as this in a regular classroom would definitely get him kicked out. And actually doing the behaviors he was referencing could put him in a school-to-prison pipeline, literally. In the moment, I didn't know what to say to him. I knew it was not in his interest or mine for him to continue to behave this way. A friend suggested I call out the behavior with a sentence such as, "You don't get listened to anywhere so you're using whatever tactics you can to get listened to here". Though I did not use this sentence, I think the frankness of naming (or at least trying to name) the emotional core driving behavior can be an effective provocation for self-reflection.

The next class, two days later, though Roy was only there for half of the class, it was an eventful 45 minutes. When I entered the room, I had a collection of students pieces matted for a show we were hanging that afternoon. The regular art teacher, Ms. F.,

was still in the room and asked to see my students work. When we got to Roy's piece she expressed a desire to direct him to make art of the same caliber. She proceeded to show me a piece he on which he was working when he was kicked out of her class earlier that day. As she was holding his piece, he entered the room. When she told him she was showing me his sub par work, bickering ensued between them. I was mentally rooting for him as he talked back to her; it takes a lot of courage to defend against someone with more power in a dominator relationship such as Roy and Ms. F's.

After Ms. F finally went home for the day, I talked to Roy about what had happened in our last meeting. I told him he should accustom himself to not talking about drugs whenever he feels like it because, while I haven't done much to curb the behavior, teachers at high school will not be as permissive and his behavior could end him up in a lot of trouble, and drugs can lead to serious health problems, prison, even death. He did not like hearing this. Even though it is my responsibility to look out for the best interests of my students, I couldn't help but feel like I was exercising my power as a White person and an authority figure. In contrast to other students, Roy was most successful with the least facilitation. Unlike his classmates, who were uncomfortable with their few skills for filling the time in between instructions with original ideas. Roy had obviously creative skills and disregard for adult authority.

Later, during studio time, the other adult in the room, a researcher from the University of Illinois, saw him distracting a diligently working classmate. When the researcher told him to leave his classmate alone, he said, "I don't even know why I'm here" and left the room. I didn't see the interaction, but when the researcher told me about it I went to the hallway to look for him. Roy had disappeared. A little while later he

came in and grabbed his drawing and said “bye Ms. Roberta” and he left. When I made my way over to the door, I saw him and his mother at the other end of the hallway leaving the school. I felt flustered by the situation; I wanted to provide Roy with real advice and direction and a safe place to make art in whatever fashion he desired. I did not want to reproduce the Whiteness of our field by stifling his expression and making him leave early or feel unwelcome. What’s even more confusing for my analysis here is the researcher who spoke with Roy also self-identifies as ABCD. This complicates things

There are few concrete answers to be found in this episode, but many of the problematic phenomena may be analyzed using some of the terms I outlined earlier. In this case study we can see examples of dominator relationships as they play out between child and adult, student and teacher in an art room, how students, consciously or unconsciously, treated Roy as an Other. Roy demonstrated more of a willingness to speak about his 8th grade identity crisis than his teachers, just as other students eager to talk about race and ethnicity are silenced by colorblind ideology and White privilege. His schoolteacher Ms. F, rather than encourage one of her most gifted students, spent her time berating him for his behavior and sub-par work. The scenario of the White teacher singling out the talented student-of-color as the only problem in the room might seem like racism, except that racism is now reproduced without referencing race *per se*, thus perpetuating the White privilege of the students of the dominator class.

#### **4.2.2 Reproducing Class via the Hegemony of Art School Aesthetics.**

Since the stories I tell in this section use my socioeconomic background as a frame through which I experienced difficulty in my pursuit of a college degree in studio arts, I find it necessary to provide a backdrop of my formative years to contextualize my

collegiate experience. In regard to the four factors provided by Scott and Leonhard (2005) in the aforementioned New York Times series on class, I look at my mother's class in terms of occupation, education, wealth, and income as it was when I lived with her. I look at only my mother because my parents separated when I was 8, and my mother moved my four sisters and I to a house in a nearby town. Because they never divorced, my father was not required to pay child support and did not. Although I saw my father on a regular basis, for all practical purposes, we became a single parent family.

My mother is a nurse and in terms of her education she has only a two-year vocational certificate, which she completed when she was 20, that qualifies her as a registered nurse. This is a career training path long since defunct, as it is now a requirement in the profession to have a bachelors degree to be a registered nurse. My mother made twelve dollars an hour or approximately twenty-four thousand dollars a year until I was 17. We lived in a rural area with a low cost of living so this income went considerably farther than it might in a suburban or urban context, even still my mother had no savings and did not own the house we lived in or any valuable property. All of her money went to groceries, rent, bills, and health care.

In terms of how material and moral values impact class, I look at the beliefs of both my mother and my father. For this I turn to Payne's (1996) problematic<sup>4</sup> *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. My parents put strong emphasis on the educational success of their children and the idea that the future is more important than the present; both values that Payne identifies as attributes of the middle class. However,

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<sup>4</sup> The framework is problematic in its application in schools, but I think the categories (though perhaps more fluid than the author identifies) are useful as a lens through which to understand how different classes make different meanings through value.

in several categories my parents' values align with what Payne identifies as values of poverty. Those values include the importance on humor in personalities, a social emphasis on inclusion of people they like, a matriarchal family structure, a local-centric outlook, and the belief that people are property.

In absence of a perfectly appropriate socioeconomic label, I consider working class to be the most accurate description within the available alternatives. As I write this paper in partial fulfillment for a masters' degree, I see my class status in flux. I am in the interstices between where I began, my parents' class, and somewhere else, some grey zone I do not yet quite understand how to navigate. In the introduction to a volume of essays entitled *Experiences of Working Class Women in the Academy* (1993), I find solace in testimonials of women with similar situations to mine. In one discussion the editors speak to the difficulty of grappling with class issues within both society and academe. One common thread of the essays in the text is the contributors' belief in "the profession [academic careers] as a vehicle for social mobility without seeing such mobility as capable of eradicating prior social identity. Still other [contributors] see class status as impervious to change" (Tokarczyk & Fay, p.21).

In hooks' (2008) essay *Confronting Class in the Classroom* she writes, "young people are more eager to deny the impact of class and class difference in our society" (p. 140). I identified with the young people she describes in that I too left the environment of my youth unquestioningly equipped with the rhetorical skills to deny class oppression; I think that, had I read this statement at 18, I would not have seen myself in it. Though I experienced discomfort as an undergraduate, I didn't understand the cause of the discomfort. I thought it was because all the people around me, all my peers, had brought

with them a whole pile of acquaintances and friends from their adolescent lives. I didn't meet many undergraduates that worked full-time, but I knew plenty of university students at my jobs so I thought little of it. If you had asked me as an undergraduate if there was a class difference between my roommates and I (half of whom were fine arts majors and all of whom had their rent and bills paid by their parents), I do not think I would have said yes.

In reflecting on why there are few people from the working class in the visual arts, I have come to three conclusions. First, there is a view that a degree in the visual arts will not help a person advance their position in the class hierarchy. This was explained to me when I called home to inform my mother of my decision to change my major from Astronomy to Painting during my second week of school as an undergraduate. She fretted and insisted I acquire a degree in art education. Since she knew no artists, and had few positive references for how a person with a studio degree makes a living, she pushed me to do something she saw as practical, something she knew could give me a stable income as an adult: a teaching credential.

Second, making a painting is an expensive endeavor. Some of the inputs—paintbrushes, palette, palette knives—are one time investments that can last the life of the artist if cared for properly, but other materials—paint, medium, and canvases—are recurring input costs. At the end of my second year of school, I started a relationship with another painting major. He was also of working class origins but as a military veteran with two Iraqi tours behind him, he had plenty of expendable income. He took me to museums and galleries and we talked about our art preferences. He questioned why the things I made were not more similar to the things I identified as attractive. Since neither



of us had any class-consciousness, it took us a while to identify the impediment to my success was not my lack of skills, but my lack of access to resources (art supplies, trips to museums). Nowhere in our educational experiences had we been exposed to conversations about class. Where before, I had skimmed on materials, and my work, heart, and grades suffered; with this partner, I had support and access to the experiences and materials I needed to succeed. After determining the cost was keeping me from using the amount of paint I needed to produce the work I wanted, he began buying all my art supplies when he bought his. He gave me access to material things that were invaluable to my success but which, after living expenses, I couldn't afford on minimum wage.

The third reason I think there are few working class origin visual artists is that, in working class culture, there is a void of information about how to behave in the spaces of the fine arts. In my experience there is etiquette for art spaces with an invisible and very real quality that makes these spaces uncomfortable for people who are unfamiliar with the rules. Instead of exemplifying this through a story about me, I'll illustrate the point through a friend's story. This friend and former classmate was an exceptional art student. She reported reading one book on art or theory *every morning*. She had gone to New Trier Township High School, one of the best high schools in the state of Illinois. Her clothes were expensive and mirrored the fancy clothes worn by the faculty; she shopped almost exclusively at *Anthropologie*<sup>5</sup>. Immediately after we finished undergrad she moved to the East Coast and got a masters degree from a prestigious university. From there she came back to the Midwest and got another masters degree from another prestigious program. When we were undergraduate's professors complimented her work

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<sup>5</sup> *Anthropologie* is an expensive clothing line. Shoes run from \$58-\$658.  
<http://www.anthropologie.com/anthro/index.jsp>

in the studio. This gave her the confidence of a positive rapport with the other instructors and respect from her peers. She understood decorum and social grace; things I still cannot internalize. She never had a job; when I asked her what she did, she reported that her parents had told her school itself was her job. She was ahead of me in every way.

Although I think it's wrong to compare one person to another, I always compared myself to her. How could I not? She was the standard. She always got A's and professors gave her positive feedback.

By contrast, I worked multiple jobs at all times throughout my undergraduate student years. I only got to know the freedom of exploring the art medium I wanted when my partner purchased a large supply of paints for me. I happened upon graduate school after I was lucky to meet someone from the Art Education department at an art opening at my low-wage Children's Museum job. I worked at bars and wore hand-me-down clothes. I didn't have as much time to read. These are structural disadvantages working class people deal with everyday, and are forbidden from discussing under the ideology of "freedom" in the United States and the mythology that anyone can make it if they work hard and pull themselves up by the bootstraps. The story of the middle class friend also can show that people often make it purely because their parents made it. And also because they are White, pretty, well situated, wearing the correct clothes, have a stable home life, know who they are, don't have to fear the police, or the art teacher who degrades their effort. In short, people also "make it" because they feel entitled to make it based on the way others in their environment are treating them.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This paper attempts to identify barriers that deter people of color and working class and poor Whites from participating comfortably in school based visual arts education. To analyze why these populations are underrepresented I draw upon the theory of hegemony and the practice of colorblind language to explain how racial and class based Other-ing reproduces wealth and Whiteness as normative, desirable values.

My study was motivated by the hope that critical consciousness of the sometimes-slippery contours of power and privilege are part of art education. My aim has not been to accuse people of ignoring (and thus perpetuating) oppressions of race, class, and gender, but rather to acknowledge the use of language and training habits that are worth naming as suspect. In my opinion it would be better to confront the legacy of racism in the United States during teacher preparation than to send off teachers to the anticipatable difficulty of constantly negotiating racialized interactions in public schools without any tools. Through narratives of multiculturalism, and colorblind practices and rhetoric, art education presents itself as inclusive. I have tried to show how a closer analysis of certain structures, and a wider theoretical perspective, one can see room for improvement.

Through an analysis of dominator relationships, my study focused on the areas that are particularly important to art education. First, I analyzed colorblind ideologies in mainstream art education journals. Then, I used two case studies as sites of how two developing artists struggled to contextualize their identities / find their voices in environments which reify Whiteness and monetary wealth respectively as normative values. For Roy, the school art environment did not allow him the freedom necessary to explore his unique issues and artistic vision. He struggled with no authentic avenues

through which to contextualize his heritage and culture. My autoethnographic analysis then recounted my personal struggle with, and discomfort in, my academic community. As a working class student who shared few cultural references with her professors, I too struggled to find authentic interventions to contextualize my experiences. With no skills for naming the source of my discomfort, and no orientation towards information that would help me articulate my critique, all I had was my individual frustration.

Throughout this paper, particularly in the case studies, it may seem as though I am framing wealth and/or Whiteness as desirable. It is not that simple. Through this project, I came to understand that I was not seeking merely to have what my perceived-as-successful middle class colleagues have had; more than anything, I want people to be valued equally. Yosso (2005) describes how

[Bourdieu's] theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expression of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'. In other words, cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society. (Yosso, p. 76)

Yosso insists on investigating for whom is a specific cultural practice valued. Similarly, in his sarcasm-loaded book *The Redneck Manifesto* (1997), Goad critiques "multiculturalism [a]s a country club that excludes white trash" (p. 22). He goes on, "if you embrace equality, sooner or later you'll be forced to hug white trash, and don't blame

me if you can't handle the smell" (p. 23). I want recognition and acceptance of differences—not for everyone to be the same—and I recognize this will sometimes be a process that challenges people to go outside of their comfort zone.

In an attempt to move the discussion forward, I provide a compilation of theoretical and practical recommendations from scholarship that propose to counter one of the problematic forces outlined in the first half of this paper. Below, the reader will find alternative models and practices that could improve the climate of art education by breaking the chain of reproduction. Specifically, I talk about the role of questioning starting points, critical pedagogy, and proposals for what to do with white guilt. I believe that in authentic communication lies potential for constructing new social realities. The paper ends with lingering questions and avenues for future research.

### **5.1 Postmodernist Perspectives: Questioning Starting Points**

Postmodern theories provide resources for combating hegemonic forces and making space for more voices. These narratives appeared as the Civil Rights Act ushered in the age of equality politics that called into question links between the hierarchical structure of our society with regard to race, gender, and historical starting points.

Emphasizing the importance of the relationship of starting points to African American 'failure' in the school system, Kunjufu (2003) writes,

I think the major distinction between Negro and African history is time. Negro history started in 1619 [when the first slaves were brought to Virginia] and African history started four million years ago. There is a historical law that states when you start will determine where you end up. If you start in 1619 you start on a plantation and end up in a ghetto. If you start four million years ago you start at

the beginning of human life and end up being free.” (p. 28)

Kunjufu’s statement illustrates how identity is dependent on the narratives within which we choose to define ourselves. By switching lenses, we see very different things, and thus can take a perspective that “there is no tradition or story that can speak with authority and certainty for all of humanity” (Giroux, 1988, p.163).

The impact of postmodern theory can be found in the art classroom that uses an integrated curriculum while remembering “in a pluralistic society, when one speaks of ‘our cultural heritage’, it is important to ask ‘whose cultural heritage?’” (Hickman, 2000, p.169). Other scholars have also discussed the different vantages that can be viewed when switching lenses. For instance, Yosso (2005) argues that Critical Race Theory can expand the “narrowly defined White, middle class values” of cultural capital by focusing research on the “assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color” (p. 77). This idea translates into the art classroom when educators employ pedagogical practices, such as visual culture, that seek to leverage the seduction of the visual domain as a counter-foil to the realm of predetermined identity politics.

## **5.2 Critical Pedagogy**

Freire (1971) first articulated the tenet’s of critical pedagogy when he proposed that teachers include the subjugated identities of the students in their formulation of their work, declaring that “pedagogy must be forged with, not for, the oppressed” (p. 25). Freire believed the learner had to be the involved in the creation of the classroom where they learn. Elaborating on this idea Ellsworth (1992) defines critical pedagogy as “support [for] classroom analysis and rejection of oppression, injustice, inequality, silencing of marginalized voices, and authoritarian social structures” (p. 92). Ellsworth

(1992) frames the goal of critical pedagogy as “critical democracy, individual freedom, social justice, and social change – a revitalized public sphere characterized by citizens capable of confronting public issues critically through ongoing forms of public debate and social action” (p. 92.). To arrive at her definition of critical pedagogy, Ellsworth reviewed more than thirty articles appearing in scholarly journals such as *Harvard Educational Review*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Educational Theory*, *Teachers College Record*, *Journal for Curriculum Theorizing*, and *Journal of Curriculum Studies*.

The theories of critical pedagogy do not always transfer into the K-12 public classroom practices, especially when teachers have never considered critical pedagogy. Castagno (2008) describes teachers blocking students’ discussions of race, and punishing boys who complain of being targeted for their race. In my experience, some children and adolescents question the naturalness of hegemonic forces and are more prone to push back against the implications of the ideologies of domination and White privilege. The adults in the Castagno study were likely shocked and frustrated when their colorblind frame came up against resistance in the form of their students’ focus on race.

In his article “Border Pedagogy in the Age of Postmodernism”, Giroux (1988) elaborates the importance of identifying power structures, writing

It is crucial that critical educators provide the pedagogical conditions for students to give voice to how their past and present experiences place them within existing relations of domination and resistance. Central to this pedagogical process is the important task of affirming the voices that students bring to school and challenging the separation of school knowledge from the experience of everyday life. (p. 177)

Anderson (1981) agrees that when knowledge is presented as a school's curriculum, society can "forget that decisions are one way of understanding based on arbitrary human constructs" (p. 36). If it is important to eliminate the artifice of the home/school divide, a way to make school knowledge and experiences of everyday life the same is for them to be indistinguishable. Art education can reflect the larger world because it is one of the few places in schools with the necessary leeway for life-centered curriculum. Critical pedagogy has provided suggestions for how to incorporate what students bring to the classroom—critical art education would seem a promising synthesis.

### **5.3 What to Do with White Guilt: A Move from Non-Racist to Anti-Racist**

In my experience, talking about Whiteness can be paralyzing. Since I began this line of research, I have heard disapproval from people across the racial and educational attainment spectrums. White and Black colleagues have voiced suspicion at my motivations as a White researcher investigating issues of race. White working class people at the bar where I worked (as a fry cook) were shocked to hear that Whiteness Studies exists as a field. There is no comfortable vocabulary available in the popular American vernacular to talk about Whiteness, and some have argued that "the end of racism will be possible only after we find a way to see Whiteness, to name it in order to examine it" (Berger, 2004, p. 31). Thus, it is imperative that our society develops a way for Whites to "demystify and unveil Whiteness as a form of domination" (Giroux, 1997, p. 292). Thus it is necessary to enumerate concrete actions a White ally to people of color can take in order to advocate against the silencing of the experiences of minority communities and encourage White people to acknowledge the power inherent in their skin.



When talking about the painfulness of learning your part in an exposed ideology Bonilla-Silva (2010) urges people to take

...a personal and political movement away from claiming to be “nonracist” to becoming “anti-racist.” Being an anti-racist begins with understanding the institutional nature of racial matters and accepting that all actors in a racialized society are affected materially (receive benefits or disadvantages) and ideologically by the racial structure. This stand implies taking responsibility for your unwilling participation in these practices and beginning a new life committed to the goal of achieving real racial equality. The ride will be rough, but after your eyes have been opened, there is no point in standing still. (p. 16- 17)

Hyland (2005) says that critical multicultural, or anti-racist, educators can do several things. First, they “engage with the community in real and meaningful ways” (454) and “see their connection to the community as integral to their identities as teachers” (p. 430). Orr (1992) proposes to distinguish between two types of people who live in communities: Inhabitants and residents. “The resident is a temporary and rootless occupant who mostly needs to know where the banks and stores are in order to plug in. The inhabitant and a particular habitat cannot be separated without doing violence to both” (p.102). Combining Orr and Hyland’s conceptions, anti-racist educators experience violence without vital connections to the community in which they operate; teachers should live and eat in the communities where their students do.

Hyland’s (2005) second characteristic of an anti-racist educator is those people who “recognize institutional racism as central in the lives of their students and understand their work as a fight against racial injustice” (p. 442). Additionally, they are perceived as

“an ally with the communities of [their] students” (Hyland, p. 454) because they “actively identify and resist racism in schools” (Hyland, p. 430). In other words, an anti-racist educator doesn’t project racism as something distant and abstract, but instead acts to expose how everyday behaviors and social structures are loaded with the cultural prerogatives of the ruling class, and the preferential treatment of those who conform.

Inability to navigate uncomfortable ideological terrain stems from the fact that “sense of [self] is embedded in particular ideologies” (Williamson, 1985, p. 92). In the aforementioned Castagno (2008) study, the failure of the White teachers to question their self identities and their silence around issues of race sent the message to their students that race and racism are either nonexistent – figments, perhaps, of students’ imaginations – or unnecessary topics of thought and conversation. Through this consistent denial of the systemic inequities, privileges, and oppressions associated with race, Whiteness is maintained. In distinction, anti-racist educators understand that “Eurocentric curriculum reinforces White culture as the norm” (Hyland, 2005, p. 449) and White anti-racist educators “see how [their] Whiteness has constructed and constricted [their] worldview” (Hyland, p. 453).

I do not mean to imply that if only teachers would acknowledge the institutional racism of the society in which they teach that all racial tensions in schools would be resolved. Art Education must acknowledge White privilege as a first step, but counter-acting racism in the classroom is extremely complex, and no prescriptive answer exists. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) claim “Tomorrow’s teacher can only repeat the gestures of his [sic] teacher of yesterday, and since the latter was merely imitating his [sic] own teacher, it is not clear how any novelty can find its way into this unbroken chain of self-

reproducing models” (p. 61). I want to assert that anti-racist educators can break the reproductive chain by holding space in their classrooms for conversations about race, especially conversations that acknowledge Whiteness, class, and gender issues such as heteronormativity, while at the same time fully integrating themselves in the communities where they teach.

In conclusion, I have three proposals to advance this investigation of underrepresented populations in art education. First, for all involved: we must ask in whose interest is the content of an education? Second, for teachers: we must take into account the students’ identities, challenges, lived experiences and voiced desires. Finally, for White people: we must move beyond claiming to be nonracist to take concrete actions that are anti-racist. We must break the reproductive chain, not because it is particular to Art Education, but rather because we know that it is everywhere, and as educators we are well-positioned to reflect on the power dynamics and to intervene in our students’ behavior. Though much complicated work remains incomplete, I hope that this study can provoke work in the direction of a more just society, where art students will engage the world not only to beautify it, but also to deconstruct its systems of oppression.

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